



JOHNSONIAN NEWS LETTER

*James L. Clifford, Editor — John H. Middendorf, Ass't Editor
610 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University,
New York 27, N. Y.*

Vol. XVII No. 4

December 1957

JOHNSON ON TELEVISION

On the afternoon of December 15 millions of viewers in the United States were introduced to Samuel Johnson and his circle in a series of dramatic scenes from the Life prepared by James Lee. Reviewers the next day, all except John Crosby, were ecstatic in praise. Superb, admirable, absorbing, a landmark in television history, shouted the critics. Peter Ustinov's performance as Johnson was hailed as masterful, brilliant, memorable, protean, classic, a triumph — "rich in its depth and touching in its deft explanation of the tragedy and triumphs of the first man to write a comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language."

For the majority of those who saw the program, brought up in the Macaulayan tradition, it was startling to find the old and ugly, deformed, deafened, nearly blind and constantly ailing, the twitching and eccentric, Johnson also an appealing figure. Evidently it came as a surprise to have him emerge "as a man of surpassing nobility of character." Here was the triumph of genius over social scars, the epitome of deep social sympathy, the heart of gold beneath the appalling rough exterior.

With all this to the good, why is it that many Johnsonians, among them your editor, thought the program almost a catastrophe? Certainly not because of the many factual errors and manipulations! We were prepared for those. In any dramatization some tampering with chronology is always necessary. One could not be too much upset at finding Lord Chesterfield as a guest of the Thrales at Streatham, or meeting Johnson and Boswell in a tavern. For dramatic purposes it may have been better to have everyone, even in the 1760s, address Johnson

as "Dr", though he insisted on the "Mr" before 1775. Even the rephrasing of Oliver Edwards' famous remark about cheerfulness always breaking in might be forgiven, though it is difficult to see why the words should have been changed. Harder to bear was the scene in which Johnson was made to confess to Boswell that the reason he hated his father was that he had sent him to a diseased wet nurse in order to save money. There is no evidence that Michael Johnson knew that Joan Marklew had anything wrong with her, and in 1709 he was in an expansive mood, just elected Sheriff, and not thinking of penny-pinching economy.

But for some of us what was far worse was the complete distortion of Johnson's character. We will not dwell on the revolting, flabby face, manufactured by the make-up artists to cover Ustinov's beard, which made Johnson look like Lon Chaney playing the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Or on the fact that in 1763, when there occurred the celebrated meeting with Boswell, Johnson already appeared so feeble and ailing that he was about ready for the grave. How this man could have swarmed up trees, as Frances Reynolds describes, or taken the arduous horse-back journey through the Hebrides, is incomprehensible. Yet once the late Reynolds' portrait was chosen as the model for the mask, then all opportunity for gradual aging was lost. But it is a pity that viewers could never have seen the great rugged features of some of the earlier portraits.

The chief mistake, as many of us see it, was Ustinov's determination to make Johnson pathetic and querulous, sniveling rather than rough and vigorous. Johnson as thus portrayed completely lacked force and vitality. What must have been booming knock-down blows were spoken by Ustinov almost in falsetto. One can hardly imagine Johnson gaining a reputation for brutality in conversation with such a manner. And to have Boswell in some scenes almost patronizing the great man was certainly out of character.

Admitted that the desire to make the Great Cham sympathetic is admirable. Granted that it is praiseworthy to stress Johnson's liberal tendencies — his hatred of slavery and respect for negroes, his dislike of repressive laws against Catholics, and his opposition to capital punishment for minor crimes. But if

to do so means that it is necessary to distort Johnson's whole personality, then someone should protest.

The telecast ended with the remark: "No man can be said to put you in mind of Samuel Johnson." Certainly not Peter Ustinov in a plastic mask! One might be tempted to paraphrase Bentley's reputed remark to Pope: "A very pretty piece of acting, Mr. Ustinov, but you must not call it Johnson."

JOHNSON NOTES

From all quarters we hear of the great success of Mary Hyde, who gave the principal address at the Lichfield Johnson celebration in September. The talk should appear soon in the annual publication of the Society. L. F. Powell writes that she was presented with the Wedgwood medallion of Johnson and with a figure of the great man carved from wood from the celebrated willow. This last was the gift of Dr. Hurst. Among visitors from this side of the Atlantic were Tom Copeland and Clarence Tracy.

At the meeting of the Johnson Club in the Gough Square House on the 13th of December Sir Harold Williams was re-elected President. The guest speaker that night was W. R. Batty from Southport, who talked on currency in Johnson's time. We hear that the paper was witty and learned, and hope to see it in print sometime.

The program of monthly meetings of the Johnson Society of London for this year is as follows: 19 Oct., G. P. Gooch, "Anglo-French Contacts in the Age of Johnson"; 16 Nov., Geoffrey Tillotson, "The Art of Johnson's Rasselas"; 14 Dec., R. W. Ketton-Cremer, "Matthew Prior"; 18 Jan., Annual General Meeting; 15 Feb., David Mathew, "Rasselas and Abyssinia"; 15 March, Ronald Mac Keith, "My Patient, Dr. Johnson"; 19 April, Richard Clements, "Johnson's Early Life in the Midlands". The meetings are held at 3 P.M. at the Mary Ward Settlement, 5-7 Tavistock Place, London W.C.1. If any of our subscribers should be in London on any of these days, he may be sure of a cordial welcome by members of the Society.

Maury Quinlan writes to ask about plans for celebrating the 200th anniversary of Rasselas early in 1959, and the 250th an-

niversary of the birth of Johnson in the fall of that year. He hopes that one of the scholarly journals may be willing to devote an entire issue to a commemorative tribute. Any other suggestions? We should begin to make plans well in advance.

It is hoped that the first volume of the new Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson — Diaries, Prayers, and Annals, edited by Ned McAdam, with Donald and Mary Hyde — should be out in April.

It has been suggested that we list a correction for the recent CBEL Supplement, where A.A. Luce's article in Hermathena on "The Philosophical Correspondence between Berkeley and Johnson" is included in the section on the compiler of the Dictionary. The Samuel Johnson of the correspondence was the future President of King's College, now Columbia University.

A number of articles should be mentioned: Richard A. Hunter and Ida Macalpine, "Alexander Boswell's Copies of The Anatomy of Melancholy, 1621 and 1624," Book Collector for Winter 1957; Nicholas Joost, "Whispers of Fancy; or, the Meaning of Rasselas," Modern Age for Fall 1957; and Sven E. Molin, "Criticism in Vacuo," Univ. of Kansas City Review for December. In this last Molin takes issue with René Wellek's remarks on Johnson's criticism, made in the first volume of his new history. According to Molin, Johnson could treat art as life without ceasing to understand the nature of art. "The marvel is that he could do it, while we cannot."

THE PERCY LETTERS

The appearance of the latest installment of The Percy Letters, The Correspondence of Thomas Percy and Evan Evans, edited by Aneirin Lewis (La. State Univ. Press), serves to remind us of this very important series. But rather than concentrate on this volume — excellent as it is in giving an inside view of eighteenth-century Celtic studies — we should like to say something more about the whole project. And even more pertinent, to urge that you use whatever influence can be mustered to see that your college library subscribes to the edition. Publications of this sort are costly and do not sell themselves. They tend to bog down if not vigorously supported. So

let us all get behind the self-sacrificing editors and push, to make certain that the publisher does not think the volumes are not wanted.

As you may remember, the plan has been to publish separately Percy's correspondences with various scholars. So far, five have appeared: with Edmond Malone (1944); with Richard Farmer (1946); with Thomas Warton (1951); with Lord Hailes (1954); and now with Evan Evans (1957). The editors hope to bring out at least four or five more volumes, including correspondences with Shenstone, George Paton, Robert Anderson, and shorter series to men like Thomas Astle and Thomas Apperley. If possible, it is hoped that Percy's Journal may also be included.

Most of the letters have never been printed before, and many of the others never before in an accurate, annotated text. In the volumes, too, there is valuable material in Appendices, such as the history of Percy's edition of Tottell's Miscellany, and the history of Percy's edition of the works of the Duke of Buckingham. Let us do all we can to encourage D. Nichol Smith, Cleanth Brooks, the General Editors, and the L.S.U. Press in this great scholarly undertaking.

A QUERY

From Donald J. Greene comes the following:

"In Vol. IX of the 1787 Works of Johnson, there is a short piece entitled 'Some Account of a Book called The Life of Benvenuto Cellini.' It had appeared in 1774 in Vol. III of Tom Davies's Miscellaneous and Fugitive Pieces, and in 1816 Chalmers again reprinted it in Works, Vol. II.

The piece is a review of Thomas Nugent's translation of Cellini's autobiography, published by Davies on June 1, 1771. One would imagine that it first appeared in some periodical, but I have not been able to locate it in one. Perhaps some reader of JNL knows where it is to be found? I have checked the Gentleman's, London, Town and Country, Universal, and Oxford Magazines, the Critical and Monthly Reviews, and the Annual Register, as well as various newspapers, for the relevant period, but without success (some of them have re-

views of the book, but not the one attributed to Johnson). Is there any periodical with which Davies is known to have been connected at the time?"

SOME NEW BOOKS

Richmond P. Bond and a number of his former students have produced a valuable contribution: Studies in the Early English Periodical (Univ. of North Carolina Press), a storehouse of information about eighteenth-century journalism. We recommend it to you. In his forty-six page Introduction, Bond describes in detail the growth of early periodicals, and admirably surveys the whole field. There follow six special investigations: "Richard Steele, Gazetteer and Bickerstaff" by Robert Waller Achurch; "The Sale and Distribution of the British Apollo" by William F. Belcher; "The Authorship of the Free-Thinker" by Nicholas Joost; "Essay Forms in the Prompter" by W.O.S. Sutherland, Jr.; "The Female Spectator, a Courtesy Periodical" by James Hodges; and "The Printing History of the World" by George P. Winship, Jr.

In The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory, by Walter John Hippel, Jr., the Southern Illinois University Press has produced a beautiful book. The jacket is particularly attractive; the typography is easy on the eyes; and there are useful illustrations. Certainly, Hippel's survey of aesthetic theory from Addison to Dugald Stewart should prove useful to all of us. While not attempting a broad synthesis, Hippel presents, in chronological order, summaries of the ideas of Addison, Hutcheson, Hume, Hogarth, Gerard, Burke, Kames, Blair, Reynolds, Reid, Alison, Gilpin, Uvedale Price, Repton, Knight, Stewart, to mention only the more important figures. The avowed purpose of the book is to provide a comprehensive survey of the concepts and differing positions of these men, so that the reader will have a thorough grounding in the major writers who so well represent the shifting taste of the period. And this aim is excellently achieved. The book is scholarly, well annotated, and carefully thought out. If not critically exciting, it is a welcome addition to our shelves.

As we noted in an earlier number, the Sanders Lectures at

Cambridge University were given last year by W.S. Lewis. These are now published in a very handsome volume, as Horace Walpole's Library (Cambridge Univ. Press). With beautiful illustrations, of course, it is a fascinating account of the modern reconstruction of the intellectual history of one man's working library in the eighteenth century. Included is a picture of the building in which occurred the nineteenth-century auction, at which time the books were dispersed to the four corners of the world — a sale which many of us firmly believe was planned for the specific purpose of giving "Lefty" and Allen Hazen a lifetime of pleasant employment tracking them down.

In order to straighten out the confused political problems of the 1740s, we can heartily recommend John B. Owen's The Rise of the Pelhams (Methuen). As Donald Greene comments, it contains one of best accounts available of the position of the Tories of that time.

In Mr. Pepys of Seething Lane (McGraw-Hill) Cecil Abernethy has put together an entertaining narrative. Not intended as a complete biography, it is merely a running account of Pepys's life during the 1660s, when he was keeping the diary.

One recent book on our favorite subject we haven't been able to read, or even to skim through. The reason? It is in Dutch. But thanks to Rosalie Colie we can say confidently that it is a charming and pleasant critical work which stresses art rather than technique. Anyone want to bring out an English translation of S. Dresden's De Structuur van de Biografie. (The Hague, 1956)?

We gladly list N.M. Karamzin's Letters of a Russian Traveler (Columbia University Press), now translated and abridged by Florence Jonas, an account of a young Russian's tour through Germany, Switzerland, France and England in 1789-1790. The English section contains a good deal of interest, showing the way London appeared to a Continental visitor.

We are delighted to hear that the Indiana University Press is reprinting Spingarn's valuable three-volume set of Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, which has long been out-of-print and virtually unobtainable.

Other recent publications to be mentioned are: Nelson S. Bushnell, William Hamilton of Bangour (Aberdeen Univ. Press; in this country the British Book Centre); C. Willett and Phyllis Cunningham, Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century (Dufour); Arthur B. Allen, Eighteenth-Century England (Rockliff Series); Christopher Hibbert, The Road to Tyburn: the Story of Jack Sheppard and the Eighteenth-Century Underworld (World); James Thomson, The Castle of Indolence, edited by Alec M. Hardie, with an Introduction by Edmund Blunden (Hong Kong Univ. Press). This last is advertised as being designed for non-European students.

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS ITEMS

Sadly we pass on news of the death on December 10 of Reginald Harvey Griffith. He was 84 years old. Thanks to Eva Colley, we have received an account of his career given in the Austin American the next day. He joined the faculty of the University of Texas in 1902, and remained active in campus affairs even after his nominal retirement in 1944. During his 55-year connection with the University he saw it grow from a small institution of only 900 students. But for us his claim to remembrance is as a Pope scholar, and as the driving force in building up the Texas Library into a great research center. He was the instigator of the movement which brought the celebrated Wrenn Library to the University of Texas, which, together with the Aitken Collection and his own rare books, has made Austin a mecca for all who are interested in the Queen Anne period. His Pope bibliography, published in two volumes in the 1920s, was a vital force in stirring up renewed interest in the work of the Augustan satirists.

We are delighted to hear that the Clarendon Press plans to bring out a new book by Geoffrey Tillotson in the Spring. This one is called Pope and Human Nature and is planned to complement his earlier work on the poetry of Pope.

Geoffrey Beard, who has helped many American scholars with their research, is now Deputy of the Leeds Art Gallery and Temple Newsam House. This is a fine 1622 mansion administered by the city of Leeds, set in a 1000 acre park and with splendid collections. He will be glad to show off his treasures to

any visitors who come that way.

As always, we welcome with enthusiasm the Philological Quarterly annual bibliography of English Literature 1660-1800, this time occupying the whole of the July issue. We find it a particularly meaty number, filled with important reviews. Congratulations to all concerned!

Among items promised by the Augustan Reprint Society for publication in the near future are: Henry Fielding's The Voyages of Mr. Job Vinegar (1740); William Herbert's Poems (1660); An Historical View .. of the Political Writers of Great Britain (1740); Francis Hutcheson, Essays on Laughter (1729); Richard Savage's An Author to Be Let (1732); Elkanah Settle's The Notorious Impostor (1692); Seventeenth-Century Tales of the Supernatural. If you are not a subscriber, and want to pick up one of the best bargains ever offered, send \$3 to the Clark Memorial Library, 2205 W. Adams Blvd., Los Angeles 18, Calif. for a year's subscription.

We eagerly look forward to the appearance in the next few months of Joyce Hemlow's The History of Fanny Burney (Clarendon); and Alan B. Howes' Yorick and the Critics (Yale).

We can't resist quoting the opening sentences of a recent review by Paul Henry Lang in the New York Herald Tribune: "An unusual occurrence took place in New York a few days ago: the Metropolitan Opera presented within the compass of one week three eighteenth-century operas. They were not only well received but played to capacity audiences. Surely, this would have been unthinkable a short generation ago, and speaks well of our rising musical taste." What were the operas? Gluck's Orfeo and Mozart's Don Giovanni and Figaro. Is this part of the new shift of sensibility back to the classic in art?

Norman D. Knox has completed a dissertation at Duke University on the topic "The Word Irony and Its Context, 1500-1755." It was done under the direction of Ben Boyce.

In September Canon J.E.W. Wallis, Chancellor of Lichfield Cathedral since 1945, died at the age of 71. An ardent Johnsonian, he was the author of a little pamphlet on Johnson and

the Dictionary, which appeared in 1947.

SOME RECENT ARTICLES

For the Restoration period there are: George G. Falle, "Dryden: Professional Man of Letters," Univ. of Toronto Quart. for July; Merle L. Perkins, "Dryden's The Indian Emperor and Voltaire's Alzire," Comparative Literature for Summer 1957; Edward N. Hooker, "Dryden and the Atoms of Epicurus," ELH for Sept.; Betty Gay Coshow, "Dryden's Zamba Dance," Explicator for Dec.; George Hemphill, "Dryden's Heroic Line," PMLA for Winter 1957; Joseph Wood Krutch, "Restoration Riches for Today's Theatre," Theatre Arts for Dec.; David M. Vieth, "Two Rochester Songs," N&Q for August and "Poems by 'My Lord R': Rochester Versus Radclyffe," PMLA for Sept.; John Quinlan, "Mrs. Pepys," Contemporary Review for July.

For the Augustan Age: R.M. Schmitz, "Two New Holographs of Pope's Birthday Lines to Martha Blount," RES for August; Jeffrey P. Hart, "T.S. Eliot: His Use of Wycherley and Pope," N&Q for Sept.; John Butt, "Pope's Letters: Some Notes and Corrections," N&Q for Nov.; Michael Shugrue, "Pope's Translation of Statius," N&Q for Nov.; Edwin B. Benjamin, "The King of Brobdingnag and Secrets of State," JHI for Oct.; Maurice J. Quinlan, "Swift and the Prosecuted Nottingham Speech," Harvard Library Bulletin for Autumn 1957; Cecil C. Seronsy, "Some Proper Names in Gulliver's Travels," N&Q for Nov.; Irvin Ehrenpreis, "The Origins of Gulliver's Travels," PMLA for Dec.; Robert A. Greenberg, "Swift's Gulliver's Travels, Part IV, Chapt. III," Explicator for Oct.

Arthur L. Cooke, "Addison and the Duke of Somerset," N&Q for July; "Mr. Spectator in Italy," N&Q for Nov.; "English Literary Autographs — Daniel Defoe," Book Collector for Winter 1957; W.J. Cameron, "Ten New Poems by Ambrose Philips," N&Q for Nov.; W.H.G. Armytage, "Camisards in London (1706)," N&Q for Nov.; Lois G. Schwoerer, "The Chronology of Roger North's Major Works," HINL for Oct.; J.E. Norton, "Some Uncollected Authors: Susanna Centlivre," The Book Collector for Summer 1957; Albert Salomon, "In Praise of the Enlightenment — in Commemoration of Fontenelle, 1657-1757," Social Research for Summer 1957; Claude E. Jones, "Moliere in England to 1775: a

Check-list," N&Q for Sept.

For the later period: Arthur Sherbo, "Fielding and Dr. South: a Post Mortem," N&Q for Sept.; Claude E. Jones, "Fielding's 'True Patriot' and the Henderson Murder," MLR for Oct.; A. E. Dyson, "Satiric and Comic Theory in Relation to Fielding," MLQ for Sept.; Seymour L. Gross, "Laurence Sterne and Eliot's 'Pruferock': an Object Lesson in Explication," College English for Nov.; A. E. Dyson, "A Note on Dismissive Irony," English for Autumn 1957; Edward A. Bloom, "'Labors of the Learned': Neo-classic Book Reviewing Aims and Techniques," SP for Oct.; Redding S. Sugg, Jr., "Hume's Search for the Key with the Leather Thong," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism for Sept.; James J. Lynch, "An Unpublished Poem by Robert Dodsley," N&Q for July; Albert Smith, "Nichol's Anecdotes of Hogarth," N&Q for August; Theodora Roscoe, "Buckinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century," Contemporary Review for May; Arthur Sherbo, "The Case for Internal Evidence: Can Mother Midnight's Comical Pocket-Book be Attributed to Christopher Smart?" Bulletin of the New York Public Library for August; A. E. Dyson, "The Ambivalence of Gray's Elegy," Essays in Criticism for July; John H. Sutherland, "The Stonecutter in Gray's Elegy," MP for August; Morris Golden, "Goldsmith and the Universal Museum and Complete Magazine," N&Q for August; John B. Shipley, "Horace Walpole: Some Mistaken Identifications," N&Q for Nov.; James Holly Hanford, "A Letter from the Swan of Lichfield," Newberry Library Bulletin for Dec.; Hans Hammelmann, "18th-Century English Illustrators: Henry Fuseli," Book Collector for Winter 1957.

J. B. Price, "William Blake, the Visionary," Contemporary Review for June; Northrop Frye, "Blake after Two Centuries," Univ. of Toronto Quart. for Oct.; Geoffrey Keynes, "Blake's Trial at Chichester," N&Q for Nov.; Edwin Wolf 2nd, "Blake Exhibitions in America," Book Collector for Winter 1957; Albert J. Kuhn, "Blake on the Nature and Origins of Pagan Gods and Myths," MLN for Dec.

THE DUNCIAD

Harriet Zinnes (621 Chautauqua, Norman, Oklahoma) writes:

"Perhaps a comment on that excellent book by Aubrey L. Williams, Pope's Dunciad, by one whose own thesis (NYU, 1953) was a study of the meaning of the poem will be of interest to your readers. It was my argument that a close study of the structure, imagery, and symbolism of the Dunciad reveals that Pope's major effort was less an offshoot of a personal quarrel than an expression of a deep belief in a principle slowly becoming obsolete in the emerging naturalistic society of his day. The poetic technique and organization of the Dunciad make clear Pope's conviction that a violation of the principle of the chain of being in artistic and literary matters would lead inexorably to universal chaos. Dunces, in a word, were to the poet sinners against the order of the universe, the whole scale of being. Professor Williams takes a similar point of view and with genuine critical and scholarly insight demonstrates Pope's thesis 'that a reign of literary dulness portends a cultural breakdown,' not only through a study of the symbolism and imagery but also of the shifts, revisions, and manipulations of the four major editions of the poem. Particularly exciting as interpretation are Williams' analysis of the influence of the rhetorical tradition on Pope's attack of the perversions of the 'word' by the dunces, the author's brilliant exposition of the simultaneity 'of historic death and imaginative transfiguration' Pope forces upon the dunces, of the significance of the parody of Paradise Lost and of Pope's use of Christian doctrine in his symbol of Dulness itself. Pope's vision of chaos through a corruption of the 'word' has for the first time found a scholarly and sensitive interpreter."

A NEW BOOK ON COWPER

Roderick Huang in William Cowper: Nature Poet (Published by the Oxford University Press for the University of Malaya) stresses Cowper's religious beliefs and gives a whole chapter to the influence of James Hervey. In general the approach is conventional, and Huang is not much interested in the early poems, remarking that Cowper's juvenilia are without significance. Yet according to Charles Van Doren, who is writing a critical book on the poems, these are among his most interesting pieces.